*International conference*

# "Literature of Socialist Trauma: Results and Prospects"

## University of Palermo, 27-28 January 2026

Palazzo Bonocore, Piazza Pretoria, 2 – Palermo

More than 35 years after the collapse of Socialist and Communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, the literary works related to state repression in the countries of the former Soviet bloc have never been studied in a unified perspective. Yet, the analysis of the vast corpus of memoirs, autobiographies, fiction, poetry and other literary texts written in a variety of countries and languages in relation to state repression suggests that several literary works bear structural and stylistic similarities even if created in different contexts. Oral poems composed by Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian and Russophone authors detained in the Soviet camps, by Yugoslavian convicts of Goli Otok or prisoners of Ceausescu's prisons and camps; memoirs in Slovenian, Serbian, Russian; hints to repression in "printed" literature in Albania, GDR and the USSR; short tales in Estonian, Polish and Russian – the list of literary works that share common features across languages is impressive and suggests the possible existence of a transnational, multilingual genre in European literature.

The project "Literature of Socialist Trauma (LOST): Mapping and Researching the Lost Page of European Literature", funded by the Italian Ministry of Research and University under the PRIN 2022 PNRR scheme, has studied for two years the possible connections between these literary texts. The results of these studies have been published or are being published in international academic journals and collected volumes. Coming to an end, the research team will meet renowned specialists in the field (Alessandro Achilli, Ruxandra Cesereanu, Dunja Dušanić, Alexander Etkind, Luba Jurgenson, Eneken Laanes and Arkadiusz Morawiec) to share with them knowledge, findings and expertise in a constant dialogue between scholars and literary texts, with the aim to understand if such a line of research can bring about further perspectives and results. This way, the final conference of the project aims to be a bridge between past and future research. In search of the hidden genre of XX and XXI century European literature.

The conference will be in English and Italian and will be broadcast live on Zoom. Simultaneous translation will be available also on Zoom. Apart from the academic programme, the conference will feature the presentation of the Italian edition of Alexander Etkind's book "Russia against Modernity" (27 January at 17.00) and the screening of the documentary film "The Dmitriev Affair" by Jessica Gorter (28 January at 17.00). The screening is organised together with Memorial Italia, the Italian chapter of the NGO Memorial, 2022 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

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# PROGRAMME

## Tuesday, 27 January 2026

9:30. *Welcome speeches* by the Rector Prof. Massimo Midiri, the Head of the Department of Humanities and Andrea Gullotta (PI of the project)

10:00. ***First session*: Memoirs of Socialist Repression**
*Moderator*: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo)
Luba Jurgenson (Paris-Sorbonne University), **The Initiation Rite in Women's Testimonies of the Gulag**
Ruxandra Cesereanu (Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj), **Resistance Strategies in the Communist Prisons and Concentration Camps from Romania. Memoirist Writings of the Romanian Gulag**
Simone Guagnelli (University of Bari), **Variations, Omissions, and Rewritings in *Put'* by Ol'ga Adamova-Sliozberg: Notes for a Possible Interpretation of the Trauma**
*Discussion*

*Coffee break*

12:00. ***Second session*: Literature of Socialist Repression and State Literature**
*Moderator*: Andrea De Carlo (University of Naples "L'Orientale")
Eneken Laanes (Tallinn University), **"Roguish and Inspiring": Picaresque Humanism in Jaan Kross's Camp Short Stories**
Arkadiusz Morawiec (University of Łódź), **"It Was Impossible not to Know. But It Was Possible to not Know that You Knew": Sławomir Mrożek and *Jaworzno***
Duccio Colombo (University of Palermo), **The Shadow of the GULag on Soviet Printed Literature**
*Discussion*

*Lunch break*

15:30. ***Roundtable 1*: Literature of Socialist Repression: Memoirs and Genre Boundaries**
*Speakers*: Maria Bidovec, Tatiana Lekova, Blerina Suta (University of Naples "L'Orientale"), Natascia Barrale (University of Palermo)

*Coffee break*

17:00. *Book presentation*: *"La Russia contro la modernità"* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2025), by Alexander Etkind. The author will discuss his work with Duccio Colombo

## Wednesday, 28 January 2026

9:30. ***Third session*: Poetry of Socialist Repression**
*Moderator*: Andrea Gullotta (University of Palermo)
Dunja Dušanić (University of Belgrade), **Studying the Poetry of Communist State Repression: Methods, Challenges and Affordances**
Alessandro Achilli (University of Cagliari), **Tradition and Intertextuality in the Ukrainian Poetry "From Behind the Bars"**
Giovanni Magliocco (University of Bari), **Poetics of Trauma and the Mystique of Suffering in Romanian Gulag Poetry**
*Discussion*

*Coffee break*

11:30. ***Fourth session*: Trauma and Representations**
*Moderator*: Simone Guagnelli (University of Bari)
Ekaterina Gurtovaya (University of Palermo), **Representations of Violence in Tamara Petkevich's *Zhizn' – sapozhok neparnyi***
Andrea F. De Carlo (University of Naples "L'Orientale"), **Russia: A "Ghostly" and "Hostile" Land. Memoirs of the Gulag by Beata Obertyńska**
Aleksandr Cherkasov (Human Rights Defense Centre "Memorial", Clermont-Auvergne University), **Geography that Never Became History: Soviet/Russian Prisons and Camps in Gulag/Dissident Memoirs vs. Contemporary Russian Political Prisoners/Ukrainian Prisoners of War and Civilian Hostages.**
Alexander Etkind (Central European University, Vienna), **Trauma, Mourning, Soothsaying: What Selective Readings of Russian Texts Could Teach about the Global Future**
*Discussion*

*Lunch break*

15:00. ***Roundtable 2*: Trauma, Poetry and Literature of Socialist Repression: Then and Now.**
*Speakers*: Rosanna Morabito, Judit Papp (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

*Coffee break*

16:30. *Closing Remarks*

17:00. Screening of the documentary film “The Dmitriev Affair”, by Jessica Gorter (The Netherlands, 2023). Introduction by Andrea Gullotta

## Academic Board

*Andrea F. De Carlo*
*Simone Guagnelli*
*Andrea Gullotta*

## Organising committee

*Federica Grasso*
*Ekaterina Gurtovaya*
*Alessia Ruolo*

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